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THEOLOGY OF COUNSELLING

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ABSTRACT: Theology of Counselling explores the integration of divine revelation, biblical principles, and human experience within counselling. Rooted in the belief that all true healing originates from God, this study presents counselling as cura animarum, the care of souls, where spiritual renewal, rather than mere psychological adjustment, is the ultimate goal. Drawing upon Scripture, church tradition, and theological reflection, counselling is portrayed as a sacred ministry that nurtures emotional, moral, and relational restoration in light of God's redemptive plan. Within the biblical framework, human beings are understood as created in the imago Dei (image of God), bearing intrinsic worth and capable of transformation through grace. The Apostles' Creed provides the doctrinal foundation for theological counselling, affirming belief in the Triune God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the basis of Christian hope, forgiveness, and renewal. Thus, theology shapes the counsellor's worldview, ensuring that counselling remains Christ-centred, Spirit-led, and grounded in the authority of Scripture. The study concludes that the counselling theology provides a conceptual framework and a spiritual mission: to guide broken humanity toward reconciliation, wholeness, and communion with God through the wisdom and compassion revealed in Jesus Christ.

Keywords: *Cura animarum, Biblical Foundation, Apostles' Creed, imago Dei, Christian Counselling.*

INTRODUCTION

Theology of Counselling is a vital discipline that integrates biblical truth with understanding human behaviour, emotion, and spiritual need. It examines how divine revelation shapes the care of souls, offering a framework that unites faith, psychology, and pastoral ministry. Rooted in Scripture and guided by the Holy Spirit, theological counselling views every human struggle through the lens of God's redemptive plan. Theology provides the "conceptual and moral foundation for Christian counselling," ensuring that counselling remains anchored in the truth of God's Word rather than in secular philosophies. In this light, counselling becomes more than problem-solving; it is a ministry of restoration, where both counsellor and counselee participate in the healing grace of Christ. Thus, the counselling theology seeks to bring wholeness to the human person by addressing emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions in the context of God's truth and love.

Biblical and Theological Foundation of Counselling

In its most fundamental sense, counselling is a relational and communicative process that promotes personal, emotional, and spiritual growth. It is an intentional interaction in which a counsellor accompanies the counselee in exploring life's challenges and discerning paths toward healing and wholeness. As Lambert (2016,2) observes, counselling is a dialogical encounter in which one individual brings forward struggles, doubts, or emotional burdens and seeks guidance from another who is both trustworthy and spiritually discerning. Within a Christian framework, this process transcends mere psychological technique; it becomes a ministry of care rooted in biblical truth and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The counsellor's task, therefore, is not to impose solutions or dictate actions, but to act as a compassionate guide facilitating the counselee's encounter with divine wisdom and truth. Through empathetic listening, prayerful discernment, and scripturally grounded reflection, the counsellor assists individuals in making decisions consistent with God's revealed will.

While counselling as a professional discipline originates in psychology and the behavioural sciences, its ultimate foundation for the Christian lies within Scripture and theology. Biblical counselling recognises that human beings are created imago Dei—in the image and likeness of God and therefore possess spiritual, moral, and relational dimensions that cannot be adequately addressed by secular methods alone. Genuine transformation in counselling must involve more than behavioural modification; it requires spiritual renewal through the redemptive work of Christ. In this sense, counselling is a pastoral and theological enterprise to restore the counselee's relationship with God, others, and themselves. It is grounded in the conviction that all true healing flows from God's grace and that the Word of God offers the ultimate framework for understanding human nature, suffering, and hope.

The theological dimension of counselling provides the conceptual foundation upon which the practice rests. The term theology derives from the Greek words theos (God) and logos (word, reason, or study), literally meaning "the study of God" or "rational discourse about God." Theology, therefore, encompasses the disciplined and systematic reflection on God's nature, attributes, and will, as well as on God's redemptive relationship with humanity and creation. It is concerned with abstract doctrine and the living reality of God's self-revelation through Scripture, history, and personal experience. As such, theology seeks to articulate faith coherently, interpret divine revelation faithfully, and apply spiritual truths meaningfully to believers' lived experiences, including those who seek healing through counselling.

Grenz and Olson (1996) state that theology is "the systematic articulation of the Christian faith in a manner that is relevant to the contemporary context while remaining faithful to biblical revelation." This definition underscores the integrative and contextual nature of theology it serves as the bridge between divine truth and human experience. In counselling, theology enables practitioners to interpret human struggles in light of God's redemptive plan, offering a spiritually grounded and pastorally sensitive framework. This dynamic process of interpretation, shaped by what John Wesley famously called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, ensures that counselling remains faithful to biblical truth while engaging the complexities of contemporary life. Theology thus functions as a

reflective and transformative discipline that shapes the counsellor's understanding of the human person and the faith community's moral, ethical, and spiritual consciousness.

Karl Barth (1958) profoundly asserted that theology is "a human response to the Word of God," emphasising that it begins not with human inquiry but with divine revelation. In Barth's view, the task of theology and by extension, theological counselling, is to listen attentively to the Word of God, interpret it faithfully, and proclaim its truth within the human context of brokenness and need. Similarly, Tillich (1951) conceives theology as "a method of correlation," seeking to relate the eternal truths of Christian revelation to the existential questions that define human life. This correlation is vital for counselling, as it allows the counsellor to interpret the counselee's anxieties, guilt, and suffering in light of God's redemptive purposes revealed in Christ. Theology, therefore, is not an abstract or detached intellectual exercise; it is a living, practical engagement with divine truth that gives meaning, coherence, and direction to human existence. Ultimately, theology is not the exclusive domain of academics or clergy it is central to every believer's faith journey and spiritual formation. Every act of reflection upon God's nature, purpose, or moral will constitutes a theological endeavour. Believers engage in theological reflection whenever they interpret their personal and communal experiences concerning divine revelation, whether in prayer, worship, ethical decision-making, or interpersonal care. Thus, theology is academic and devotional, uniting faith and reason to understand God's will.

In counselling, theology provides the foundational worldview that affirms the dignity of the counselee, the reality of sin and redemption, and the hope of transformation through grace. Biblical revelation anchors the counsellor's understanding of human suffering and healing, ensuring that the counselling process remains Christ-centred, Spirit-led, and grounded in the authority of Scripture. Consequently, the biblical and theological foundations of counselling affirm that the ultimate goal of counselling is not merely psychological adjustment but spiritual renewal, a journey of restoration that leads individuals into deeper communion with God and authentic wholeness in Christ.

The Apostles' Creed in the View in Counselling

The Apostles' Creed is one of the earliest and most universally accepted statements of Christian counselling. In the view of counselling, the Apostles' Creed affirms the foundation of Christian hope and healing. Counselling must align with the Apostolic Creed, as it anchors faith and practice in the foundational truths of Christian belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Such grounding ensures counselling remains Christ-centred, doctrinally sound, and spiritually transformative. It declares faith in God the Creator, acknowledging human dignity as God's creation; in Jesus Christ the Redeemer, offering forgiveness and restoration; and in the Holy Spirit, empowering transformation and comfort. Its confession of the "communion of saints" supports community and relational care, while "the forgiveness of sins" and "life everlasting" provide assurance, purpose, and hope essential for emotional and spiritual healing in counselling. It serves as a concise summary of core Christian beliefs, reflecting the teachings of the apostles and the early Church. Though not written directly by the apostles, the Creed developed as a baptismal confession in the early centuries of Christianity and has remained foundational to Christian theology, liturgy, and spiritual formation. As McGrath (2017,54) explains, the Apostles' Creed "functions as both a summary of Christian doctrine and a lens through which believers interpret the narrative of salvation."

The Apostles' Creed traces its origins to the early baptismal formulas of the second and third centuries, especially those used in the Church of Rome. It gradually evolved from what is known as the Old Roman Symbol, a brief statement of faith recited during baptism. According to Kelly (1972,102), '' the Creed achieved its final form by the eighth century and was widely used across Western Christianity.'' While the name "Apostles' Creed" implies apostolic authorship, scholars generally agree that it was not written by the apostles but was derived from their teachings and the apostolic tradition. Pelikan (2003,29) observes that the Creed "embodies the apostolic community's faith as transmitted through the early Church Fathers." Its content reflects key New Testament doctrines about God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, as well as the Church, forgiveness, resurrection, and eternal life.

Text of the Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy Church; The communion of saints; The forgiveness of sins; The resurrection of the body; And the life everlasting. Amen.

This Creed is used in most Western Christian traditions, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, and Reformed churches, often as part of baptismal rites, catechism, and daily prayers.

Theological Significance in the Apostles' Creed in Counselling

In counselling, the Apostles' Creed plays a vital role in education and ecumenical dialogue. Its universal acceptance makes it a bridge between different denominations. As McGrath (2017,57) affirms, "The Creed provides a doctrinal anchor in an age of moral and theological relativism, reminding believers of the unchanging truths of the gospel." Moreover, the Creed informs Christian counselling, ethics, and pastoral ministry by grounding faith practices in core theological convictions. It provides hope, moral direction, and assurance of eternal life, all essential to human well-being and spiritual resilience. The Creed's affirmation of "the forgiveness of sins" and "the life everlasting" resonates deeply with believers seeking healing and restoration in times of suffering.

The Apostles' Creed serves several theological functions.

1. It expresses the Trinitarian structure of Christian faith in counselling belief in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It thus provides a doctrinal summary of divine revelation and the plan of salvation. As Barth (1964,112) notes, "The

Creed stands as a faithful witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in the Church.''

2. The Creed serves as a confession of faith and unity among Christians in Counselling. It has historically united believers across denominational and cultural boundaries, affirming shared beliefs amidst diversity. It is also pedagogical, providing a framework for teaching Christian doctrine. In early Christianity, catechumens (new converts) memorised and recited it during baptism as a declaration of their faith.
3. Apostles' Creed affirms the historical and redemptive nature of Christianity in Counselling. The references to Jesus' birth, suffering, death, and resurrection emphasise that salvation is grounded in real historical events. According to Pelikan (2005,61), the Creed is not "a speculative theology but a proclamation of what God has done in history for human redemption."
4. Creed remains spiritually formative in counselling. It is a daily reminder of the believer's relationship with God and the Christian community. Reciting the Creed strengthens faith, reinforces identity, and cultivates a sense of belonging to the universal Church.

Counselling in Imago Dei

From a Christian perspective, counselling can be understood as honouring each person's ''imago Dei'' (image of God). The doctrine of imago Dei teaches that humans are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26–27), endowed with dignity, relational capacity, rationality, and moral responsibility (e.g., "God created man in his own image … male and female he created them") (see Genesis 1:26–27). This theological truth offers a foundational lens for how counsellors view clients, conceptualise problems, and pursue healing.

First, seeing each counselee as bearing God's image affirms intrinsic worth and dignity, apart from performance, pathology, or productivity. Because each person is created in God's image, no one is expendable or worthless; even those suffering from severe mental disturbance or moral failure are to be treated with respect, care, and compassion. The imago Dei is central to a Christian personality theory; the Christian counsellor must treat all clients respectfully. The implication is that counselling

should never reduce individuals to symptoms or diagnoses but always regard them as image-bearers before God.

Second, the imago Dei suggests that human brokenness does not erase God's imprint: sin has marred but not obliterated the divine likeness. Thus, counselling must navigate both the reality of damage (emotional wounds, maladaptive patterns, cognitive distortions) and the hope of restoration. In this view, true healing does not merely manage symptoms but participates in the renewal of the imago Dei within the client. Our ability to image God is restored through salvation and grace, minds are renewed, hearts purified, and relationships are reconciled. In counselling, one goal is to help clients re-imagine themselves as God sees them and live in ways consonant with that restored identity.

Moreover, counselling as Imago Dei frames a holistic anthropology. Biblical counselling traditions rooted in the imago Dei emphasise that humans are relational, rational, volitional, emotional, and embodied (i.e., physical). A genuinely Christian counselling model will address all these dimensions, not isolating the mind from the body or the spirit from emotion. For instance, emotional pain might point to relational fracture, spiritual alienation, or cognitive distortions; so a counsellor must attend to multiple layers. This integration resists a dualistic split and honours the person's fullness as made in God's image.

Another implication is that counselling is a relational endeavour, not merely a technique. Since God is relational (Father, Son, Spirit) and created beings to image that relationality, counselling should be grounded in trust, empathy, and mutual respect. Clients who experience genuine relational presence, safe space, and active listening are honoured as relational image bearers of God. In a sense, the counsellor mirrors God's presence, offering a microcosm of divine care.

Finally, the imago Dei situates counselling within redemptive hope. The counsellor's role is to relieve distress and accompany clients toward transformation, sanctification, and greater conformity to Christ (the perfect imago). The New Testament speaks of believers being "transformed into the same image" (2 Cor. 3:18) and putting on the "new self, created after the likeness of God" (Eph. 4:24). Thus,

Christian counselling can be understood as participating in God's work of healing and re-creation in human lives.

Counselling is grounded in the doctrine of ''imago Dei'' which means:

i. clients are always treated with dignity because they bear God's image;
ii. brokenness is real, but not final; healing aims at restoring the divine likeness;
iii. counselling must address the whole person, body, soul, mind, and relationships;
iv. counselling is relational, reflecting God's relational nature;
v. the goal is hope and transformation toward Christlikeness. In this way, counselling becomes more than problem-solving it becomes a participation in God's healing purposes for image bearers.

Education in Counselling

Counselling education refers to training, teaching, and developing professional counsellors with the knowledge, skills, and ethical understanding necessary for effective counselling practice. It involves theoretical and experiential learning, combining psychological, sociological, and theological insights to prepare individuals to respond to human needs in diverse contexts (Gladding 2018,5). Counselling education ensures practitioners can provide emotional, social, academic, and spiritual support to those in need. The quality of counsellor education directly influences the quality of counselling practice. Therefore, educational programs in counselling are designed to integrate theory, research, ethics, and practical experience. According to Erford (2018,17), effective counsellor education aims to develop self-awareness, interpersonal sensitivity, and professional identity. This integration helps counsellors acquire intellectual knowledge and embody compassion and empathy.

Education in counselling is both academic and developmental. It is scholarly in providing students with theoretical frameworks, such as cognitive-behavioural, person-centred, and psychodynamic (Corey, 2016,43). It is developmental because it nurtures emotional intelligence, moral judgment, and personal growth in the trainee counsellor. Counselling education does not merely train technicians but forms reflective practitioners who understand human behaviour holistically. The purpose of

education in counselling is to prepare individuals for the professional role of helping others achieve personal, relational, and emotional well-being. As Gysbers and Henderson (2012, 22) state, the goal is to enable counsellors to facilitate human development and adjustment across the lifespan. This purpose is achieved through coursework, supervised practicum, research, and self-reflection. Education in counselling contributes to the broader mission of education itself by promoting mental health, moral values, and social responsibility within learning institutions. By equipping counsellors to address students' psychological and emotional needs, counselling education enhances the overall effectiveness of the educational system.

Biblical in Counselling

The Bible of theology refers to Scripture as the ultimate source and foundation for understanding God's nature, human purpose, and moral truth. It reveals divine principles that shape Christian doctrine and guide ethical living. Theology interprets biblical revelation to explain God's relationship with humanity and His redemptive plan through Christ. Therefore, the Bible is a spiritual text and the core framework for theological reflection and counselling practice. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible can be rightly understood as a divine record of God's redemptive counselling relationship with humanity. The term counselling in biblical and theological context goes beyond modern psychological techniques; it refers to God's engagement with human beings in their brokenness, rebellion, suffering, and search for meaning. From creation to consummation, Scripture presents God as the ultimate counsellor, guiding humanity toward restoration, wisdom, and wholeness. Every narrative, law, prophecy, poem, gospel, and epistle contributes to the divine dialogue of healing, reconciliation, and transformation.

In Genesis, God begins counselling by conversing with Adam and Eve after their disobedience (Gen. 3:9–13). God's question, "Where are you?" is a moral and pastoral inquiry, reflecting divine initiative in helping humanity recognise its condition and need for restoration. The patriarchal narratives of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph demonstrate God's guidance, comfort, and correction through life's trials. Adams (1986,45) states, "From the earliest dealings with mankind, God has acted as the supreme Counsellor, giving direction, rebuke, encouragement, and promise."

This pattern reveals that divine counsel is central to God's relationship with humankind.

The Wisdom literature Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job represent a significant corpus of biblical counselling. These writings deal with emotions, suffering, moral choices, depression, fear, and faith. Proverbs especially presents God's wisdom as practical guidance for living: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed" (Prov. 15:22, NIV). The Psalms offer emotional counselling, giving voice to despair, guilt, and hope, while Job explores the theology of suffering and divine purpose. McMinn and Campbell (2007,122) affirm that the wisdom texts "stand as ancient case studies in spiritual and emotional health, inviting readers into honest dialogue with God."

The Prophets serve as divine counsellors to the nation of Israel. God calls people to repentance, restoration, and renewed covenantal faithfulness through them. Isaiah refers to the coming Messiah as "Wonderful Counsellor" (Isa. 9:6), identifying Jesus Christ as the ultimate embodiment of divine wisdom and comfort. The prophets predict and provide moral, emotional, and social correction addressing grief, injustice, and spiritual disorientation. Their work aligns with the counsellor's task of confronting dysfunction while offering hope in God's redemptive plan.

The Gospels present counselling in its most whole revelation, God incarnate, counselling humanity in person through Jesus Christ. Jesus' ministry is deeply pastoral: He listens, empathises, teaches, heals, forgives, and restores. His interactions with individuals, the Samaritan woman (John 4:1–26), Nicodemus (John 3:1–21), and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11) are profound counselling encounters. Crabb (1977,83) states, "Jesus' way with people provides the perfect model for Christian counselling, combining truth with grace." Christ addressed sin, shame, fear, and identity through parables and personal dialogue, core issues in all counselling contexts.

In the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, the counselling ministry of Christ continues through the Holy Spirit and the Church. The apostles guide believers through community challenges, persecution, and moral failure. Paul's letters to the

Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians contain pastoral counsel for personal growth, relational reconciliation, and spiritual maturity. The Holy Spirit is described as the Paraclete, literally, the "Counsellor" or "Comforter" (John 14:26), who indwells believers to guide, teach, and heal. Collins (2007,65) states, "The Spirit's presence transforms the counselling task from mere advice-giving to participation in divine guidance and transformation."

Finally, the Book of Revelation closes the biblical narrative with a message of ultimate hope and restoration. God's final counsel to His people is endurance, comfort, and eschatological assurance that pain, sorrow, and death will be no more (Rev. 21:1–5). Revelation offers the ultimate therapeutic conclusion: the complete renewal of creation and reconciliation between God and humanity. From Genesis to Revelation, the trajectory of Scripture moves from brokenness to wholeness, alienation to communion, despair to hope, mirroring the counselling process of healing and transformation. As Adams (1986,98) observes, "All Scripture is counselling because all Scripture is designed to change people." Therefore, Christian counselling finds its source, authority, and ultimate goal in the narrative arc of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, where divine counsel leads humanity toward redemption and eternal peace.

Sources of Theological Counselling

1. **The Bible as the Primary Source of Counselling**: The Bible is the most authoritative source of Christian counselling. It provides divine wisdom and guidance for addressing human struggles such as guilt, anxiety, brokenness, and sin. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states, "God inspires all Scripture and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." This passage establishes the sufficiency of Scripture in equipping individuals for godly living and emotional stability. Counselling based on the Word of God aims to transform the inner life through obedience to divine truth (Adams, 1979,42). In the Old Testament, God frequently counselled His people through prophets, priests, and wise men. For example, Jethro counselled Moses on leadership and delegation (Exodus 18:13–27), demonstrating the value of godly advice in achieving order and peace. Similarly, the Psalms express emotional honesty and dependence on God in times

of distress (Psalm 42:11), serving as models for emotional expression in counselling contexts (Crabb 1977,112). The Wisdom Literature, especially Proverbs and Ecclesiastes,emphasises the importance of wise counsel. Proverbs 15:22 states, Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed," reinforcing that guidance from God and His people leads to well-being (Tan 2011,57). The New Testament reveals Jesus Christ as the ultimate counsellor. His interactions with people such as the woman at the well (John 4:1–26) and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11) demonstrate compassion, understanding, and truth-telling. He addressed the symptoms of human suffering and their spiritual roots. Moreover, the Holy Spirit, called the Paraclete or Counsellor (John 14:16,17), continues Jesus' ministry by comforting and guiding believers in truth. This shows that Christian counselling continues Christ's divine act of healing and restoration.

2. **Theological Sources of Counselling:** Theology provides the interpretive framework for understanding counselling. It explains the human condition, the nature of sin, redemption, and transformation. Without theology, counselling risks becoming purely psychological and detached from spiritual truth. The primary theological sources of counselling include the doctrines of creation, sin, redemption, sanctification, and the work of the Holy Spirit.
   i. **Doctrine of Creation:** The doctrine of creation teaches that humans are made in the image and likeness of God (imago Dei), endowed with rationality, emotions, and the capacity for relationship (Genesis 1:27). Every person possesses inherent dignity and value. Christian counselling, therefore, seeks to restore this divine image when it has been distorted by sin, abuse, or trauma (Benner 2003,78). The counsellor views the counselee not as a problem to be fixed but as a person to be loved and restored according to God's purpose.
   ii. **Doctrine of Sin:** The doctrine of sin explains the root of human suffering and brokenness. Sin distorts the mind, corrupts relationships, and alienates people from God. As Adams (1979,46) states, many emotional and psychological issues stem from spiritual disobedience and the resulting guilt or shame. Counselling, therefore, helps individuals confront sin, confess, and experience

forgiveness through Jesus Christ. The goal is not mere emotional relief but spiritual renewal.

iii. **Doctrine of Redemption:** Redemption is central to the theology of counselling. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, humanity is offered forgiveness and reconciliation with God (Romans 5:8-11). Counselling grounded in redemption emphasises hope and restoration. The counsellor represents God's grace, guiding the counselee toward healing and freedom in Christ (McMinn and Campbell, 2007,63). Redemption transforms counselling from a secular therapeutic process into a sacred journey of spiritual renewal.

iv. **Doctrine of Sanctification:** Sanctification refers to becoming more like Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is both a theological and practical source for counselling because it emphasises growth and transformation over time (Philippians 2:12-13). Counselling assists believers in developing spiritual disciplines such as prayer, forgiveness, and obedience, which contribute to inner healing and spiritual maturity (Tan 2011,88). Thus, sanctification underscores counselling as a lifelong process of being shaped into Christ's image.

v. **The Holy Spirit as Counsellor:** The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in counselling as the divine Comforter who convicts, heals, and guides. According to John 14:26, the Spirit teaches and reminds believers of God's truth. Counsellors depend on the spirit for discernment and wisdom to address deep emotional and spiritual issues. As McMinn (2011, p. 95) notes, effective counselling integrates psychological knowledge with spiritual guidance empowered by the Holy Spirit.

3. **Integration of Biblical and Theological Sources**: When combined, biblical and theological sources form a comprehensive foundation for Christian counselling. The Bible provides direct revelation and moral instruction, while theology offers a systematic understanding of God's nature and human behaviour. Integrating both ensures that counselling is spiritually sound and psychologically practical. Collins (2007,110)emphasises that Christian counsellors must base their interventions on Scripture while remaining aware of theological truths about humanity, sin, and

grace. In doing so, counselling becomes an act of ministry that mirrors God's redemptive work in restoring human lives.

Aims of Theology of Counselling

Theologically, *c*ounselling occurs whenever and wherever God's people engage in conversations anchored in Scripture, centred on Christ and the Gospel, dependent on the Holy Spirit, and directed toward sanctification. It is rooted in the ***Church's life***, attentive to heart issues, comprehensive understanding, and oriented toward mission. The following aims define the purpose and direction of the theology of counselling:

1. Anchored in Scripture – Biblical counselling draws its theory and practice from God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Counsellors must rightly interpret Scripture and apply it meaningfully, developing personal character and practical skills to help others grow in wisdom and faith (Rom. 15:14; Col. 1:28–29).
2. Centred on Christ – At the heart of biblical counselling is the person and work of Jesus Christ. His sinless life, sacrificial death, resurrection, reign, and promised return provide the foundation for addressing human sin, suffering, and the hope of redemption (John 1:14).
3. Dependent on the Holy Spirit and Prayer – True change is not humanly engineered but is a work of the Holy Spirit. He illuminates God's Word, convicts of sin, and empowers transformation, making prayer and reliance on Him indispensable to wise counselling (John 14:15, 16:16; 2 Cor. 3:17-18).
4. Directed Toward Sanctification – The goal of biblical counselling is intentional discipleship, helping believers grow into Christlike maturity. This involves a lifelong transformation beginning at salvation and culminating in Christlikeness, as believers reflect Him in every aspect of life (Phil. 2:12–13; Gal. 5:22–6:10).
5. Rooted in the Life of the Church – Counselling is not a private, individualistic process but belongs within the body of Christ. The church community provides the relational context for growth, accountability, and healing (Eph. 4; 1 Cor. 12:12–27).
6. Attentive to Heart Issues – Human behaviour flows from our desires, intentions, and affections from the heart. Wise counselling goes beyond surface behaviour to address the inner person, exposing idols and cultivating worship of God (Heb. 4:12–13; Matt. 23:23–28).

7. Comprehensive in Understanding – Created in God's image, people are complex beings, spiritual, relational, rational, emotional, volitional, and physical (Gen. 1:26–28). Biblical counselling acknowledges the interplay of body and soul, encouraging medical care where appropriate, while focusing on holistic spiritual transformation.
8. Missionally Oriented – Biblical counselling is restorative but also evangelistic and missional. It seeks to display Christ's wisdom to believers and non-believers, pointing all people to the only Redeemer and source of lasting change.

   In essence, the biblical view of counselling is an intentional ministry of the Word and Spirit, aiming not merely at problem-solving but heart transformation, discipleship, and participation in God's mission to redeem and renew His people.

Impact on Theology of Counselling

i. **Restoration of the Biblical Vision of Humanity**: One of the most significant impacts of the theology of counselling is its restoration of a biblical anthropology, a view of human beings created in the imago Dei (image of God). In a world dominated by secular psychological theories that often view human beings as mere biological or social entities, theological counselling reaffirms that people are spiritual, moral, and relational beings designed for communion with God and others. According to Johnson (2010,49), "Christian counselling that is theologically grounded reclaims the truth that human identity and purpose flow from our creation in the image of God." This perspective influences how counsellors view clients and how clients come to understand themselves. The imago Dei reminds both counsellor and counselee that every individual, regardless of brokenness or sin, possesses inherent dignity and the potential for redemption through Christ. Furthermore, Crabb (1977,81) emphasises that theology gives counselling a higher goal than symptom relief; it seeks the restoration of the soul to right relationship with God. The impact of this theological perspective is transformative: it redefines mental and emotional healing as spiritual renewal, not merely behavioural adjustment. Thus, the counselling theology calls the Church to view human problems through divine purpose and grace.

ii. **Integration of Faith and Practice:** The theology of counselling has also had a profound impact by promoting the integration of faith and psychological practice.

Historically, the Church's approach to soul care was rooted in Scripture and pastoral theology, but as psychology developed as a separate discipline, these areas drifted apart. The counselling theology seeks to bridge this divide by emphasising that all truth is God's truth and that psychological insights must be evaluated and interpreted through biblical revelation. Grenz and Olson (1996,24) argue that theology "serves as the interpretive framework for integrating human knowledge into a coherent understanding of life before God." This integration has encouraged Christian counsellors to engage with psychology critically and constructively, using tools from modern science without compromising spiritual truth. Lambert (2016,35) describes this as a "theological calibration" of counselling practice, where the authority of Scripture guides the use of secular knowledge. As a result, many Christian institutions have developed counselling programs that blend theology, psychology, and pastoral care. This integration helps students and practitioners apply biblical wisdom to real-life emotional and relational challenges, ensuring that counselling remains spiritually authentic and professionally competent. The impact is seen in the growing recognition that effective Christian counselling must be grounded in a robust theological worldview.

iii. **Reinvigoration of the Church's Pastoral Ministry:** The counselling theology has revitalised the Church's soul care ministry, reminding clergy and lay leaders that caring for souls (cura animarum) is central to the Church's mission. For centuries, pastoral care was the primary context in which people sought help for emotional and moral struggles. However, as Oden (1984,49) notes, the modern Church gradually ceded this role to secular mental health professionals, weakening its understanding of its pastoral calling. The rediscovery of theological counselling has led to a renewal of this ancient ministry. Pastors and church leaders are being re-equipped to address emotional distress, relational conflict, and moral failure through biblical guidance, prayer, and community support. Collins (2007,123) observes that "the theology of counselling reclaims the church as a healing community where God's grace restores broken lives." This has also encouraged the development of pastoral counselling ministries, small group discipleship programs, and faith-based recovery models that emphasise the integration of Scripture and spiritual formation in counselling. Additionally, theological counselling has

reinforced the idea that healing occurs best within the community of faith, not in isolation. The Church provides a context of accountability, support, and love that complements professional therapy. As Kellemen (2015,85) states, "The local church is God's ordained context for gospel-centered counselling where truth and grace intersect in authentic relationships." This emphasis has profoundly impacted ecclesiology, redefining the Church as both a worshipping and a healing community.

iv. **Reframing of Suffering and Redemption:** Another vital impact of the theology of counselling lies in its redemptive understanding of suffering. While secular psychology often focuses on minimising pain or enhancing pleasure, theological counselling views suffering as a potential context for spiritual growth and sanctification. Through the lens of biblical theology, suffering becomes an avenue for encountering God's grace and developing Christlike character. Powlison (2010,37) asserts that "Christian counselling does not seek to eliminate suffering at all costs but to interpret it in light of God's redemptive purposes." This theological reframing transforms how both counsellors and counselees approach pain, loss, and trauma. Instead of viewing suffering as meaningless, it is understood as part of the believer's journey toward maturity (Romans 5:3–5; James 1:2–4). This perspective also impacts pastoral care in times of crisis, grief, and moral failure. It encourages counsellors to walk individuals through their pain rather than offer simplistic solutions. Crabb (1977,145) explains that "God uses the struggles of life to bring people into deeper dependence on Him." The theology of counselling thus shifts the goal from mere comfort to spiritual transformation, integrating emotional healing with the process of sanctification.

v. **Influence on Ethical and Moral Formation:** The counselling theology also significantly impacts ethics and moral development. Because it is grounded in Scripture, it provides an objective moral framework that counters the relativism of modern psychology. Counsellors guided by theology understand human problems not only as psychological issues but also as moral and spiritual ones. Adams (1970,29) argued that actual counselling must address sin, repentance, and obedience as central to healing. This view has shaped the ethical consciousness of Christian counselling, ensuring that counsellors do not merely validate feelings but

guide clients toward moral responsibility before God. Johnson (2010,143) adds that theology brings "moral depth" to counselling by grounding human behaviour in divine revelation rather than shifting cultural norms. This impact extends to the counsellor's own formation. Theological counselling emphasises the spiritual and moral maturity of the counsellor, who must model integrity, humility, and dependence on the Holy Spirit. As Lambert (2016,60) notes, "The counsellor's character and spiritual life are part of the ministry of truth; they are as essential as the method or theory employed."

vi. **Contribution to Holistic Healing and Transformation:** Finally, the theology of counselling promotes a holistic vision of healing, one that unites the emotional, psychological, spiritual, and relational dimensions of life. Theological counselling recognises that human beings are complex and that true healing involves every part of the person. As McNeill (1951,76) wrote, "The cure of souls involves the totality of human existence body, mind, and spirit within God's redemptive work." By integrating theology into counselling, practitioners help clients experience healing that is not merely therapeutic but transformative. This transformation reflects God's redemptive purpose in the believer's life, leading to renewed faith, restored relationships, and a reoriented sense of purpose. The theology of counselling thus impacts how Christian communities understand mental health, encouraging the Church to engage in compassionate, biblically grounded care that points people to Christ as the ultimate healer.

Challenges of the Theology of Counselling

Though grounded in Scripture and vital to the Church's pastoral ministry, the theology of counselling faces several challenges in both theory and practice. These challenges arise from the tension between theological convictions and contemporary psychological theories, the growing secularisation of the helping professions, the diversity of human experience, and the struggle to maintain biblical authority in a pluralistic society. Understanding these challenges is essential for developing a robust and practical counselling theology that remains faithful to Scripture while responding to the complex needs of modern individuals.

i. **The Tension Between Theology and Psychology:** One of the primary challenges in theological counselling is reconciling the relationship between theology and psychology. While psychology offers valuable insights into human behaviour and emotional processes, its foundational assumptions often differ from those of Christian theology. Psychology, especially in its secular forms, is typically based on humanistic or naturalistic worldviews that exclude divine revelation. As Johnson (2010,73) notes, "The tension between psychology and theology arises from competing visions of what it means to be human and how human problems are best understood and resolved." This tension creates difficulties for Christian counsellors who wish to integrate psychological tools without compromising biblical truth. Some approaches risk overemphasising psychology and reducing theology to a supplementary role, while others reject psychology altogether, viewing it as incompatible with Scripture. Adams (1970,13), for example, argued that secular psychology's reliance on human wisdom rather than divine revelation leads to spiritual error and confusion. The challenge, therefore, lies in developing a theological framework that honours the authority of Scripture while discerning which psychological insights align with biblical anthropology. Lambert (2016,25) emphasises that biblical counselling must be "theologically driven and scripturally grounded," avoiding syncretism with secular ideologies. Yet, he also acknowledges that specific psychological observations about human behaviour may complement, though not replace, biblical truth. Finding this balance remains a central and ongoing challenge within the counselling theology.

ii. **The Problem of Biblical Sufficiency and Application:** A second challenge is the interpretation and application of biblical sufficiency in counselling practice. The doctrine of biblical sufficiency asserts that Scripture provides all the necessary principles for understanding and addressing human problems (2 Timothy 3:16-17). However, counsellors often struggle with how to apply these principles to specific psychological or emotional issues such as trauma, depression, or personality disorders. Crabb (1977,81) points out that while the Bible provides ultimate truths about human nature and moral responsibility, it does not always prescribe detailed techniques for addressing every psychological symptom. Consequently, Christian counsellors must exercise wisdom in applying biblical truth to contemporary life.

The challenge lies in distinguishing between universal spiritual principles and the contextual tools that can assist in using them effectively. Moreover, overemphasising "proof-texting" or using isolated verses to solve complex human problems can lead to superficial or harmful counselling. Johnson (2010,92) warns that "a theology of counselling must go beyond mere citation of Scripture to engage deeply with the theological themes that shape a redemptive understanding of human experience." Thus, the challenge is not whether the Bible is sufficient but how that sufficiency is interpreted and operationalised in pastoral practice.

iii. **The Influence of Secularism and Cultural Pluralism:** Another significant challenge for the theology of counselling is the influence of secularism and cultural pluralism in modern society. As Western culture becomes increasingly secularised, religious perspectives on counselling are often marginalised or dismissed as outdated. The rise of relativism and multiculturalism has also led to diverse and sometimes conflicting worldviews regarding truth, morality, and human flourishing. Oden (1984,49) observes that "modern pastoral care has been deeply influenced by secular therapeutic culture, often at the expense of theological integrity." In many counselling settings, the authority of Scripture and the role of spiritual formation are minimised, replaced by human-centred approaches focused on self-fulfilment rather than sanctification. This creates an identity crisis for Christian counsellors who must navigate professional expectations while remaining faithful to their theological convictions. Furthermore, cultural pluralism presents challenges in cross-cultural counselling, where differing values, traditions, and worldviews can complicate applying biblical truth. The counsellor must remain sensitive to cultural differences while upholding the universality of the gospel. As Kellemen (2015,132) argues, "Gospel-centered counselling is both culturally aware and theologically uncompromising it listens with compassion but speaks with conviction."

iv. **The Neglect of the Church's Role in Soul Care:** A significant challenge to theological counselling is the diminishing role of the Church in providing soul care. Historically, the Church was the primary institution for pastoral counselling, offering spiritual and emotional guidance through the ministry of the Word, prayer, and community. However, much of this responsibility has shifted to secular professionals in recent centuries. McNeill (1951,76) lamented this shift, describing

it as “the gradual loss of the church’s ancient ministry of the cure of souls (cura animarum).” Pastoral counselling is undervalued or neglected in many churches today, often viewed as the domain of trained therapists rather than ministers or lay leaders. This separation undermines the biblical vision of the Church as a healing community. Collins (2007,95) stresses that “theology of counselling must reassert the church’s pastoral responsibility to care for people’s emotional and spiritual needs.” Reclaiming this ministry requires equipping pastors and believers with biblical counselling skills and reestablishing the Church as a place of grace and restoration.

v. **The Challenge of Suffering and Theodicy**: Another profound challenge within the theology of counselling concerns the problem of suffering and evil. Counsellors must address why a good and sovereign God allows pain, loss, and injustice. While Scripture provides theological explanations for suffering, such as the consequences of sin and the redemptive value of trials, applying these truths pastorally requires great sensitivity. As Powlison (2010,37) explains, “The counsellor’s task is not to explain away suffering but to help the counselee encounter God within it.” However, many counselees struggle to reconcile their pain with their faith, leading to doubt, anger, or despair. Theological counsellors face the difficult balance of offering truth and compassion, affirming God’s sovereignty while acknowledging human grief. Crabb (1977,145) notes that simplistic answers can harm rather than heal, suggesting that counsellors should walk with sufferers through their pain in faith, pointing them to Christ, who fully entered into human suffering. The challenge lies in embodying a theology of hope that neither denies suffering nor diminishes God’s goodness.

vi. **The Professionalisation and Fragmentation of Christian Counselling:** The growth of Christian counselling movements since the 1970s has led to diversity in approaches, ranging from strictly biblical counselling to integrative models combining theology and psychology. While this diversity can enrich the field, it creates confusion and division over core principles. Lambert (2016,42) identifies this fragmentation as a result of “the lack of a unified theological foundation.” Without a coherent theology, Christian counselling risks becoming merely a Christianized version of secular therapy. Moreover, the increasing demand for

academic credentials and licensure in counselling professions can marginalise pastors and lay counsellors who are intensely trained in Scripture but not formally certified. The challenge is to develop theological counselling models that are both academically credible and biblically faithful.

Implications of Theological Counselling

The theological, spiritual, ethical, and practical implications of biblical and theological counselling for counsellor and counselee.

1. **Theological Implications:** The first implication of biblical and theological counselling is its affirmation that theology is central to understanding human nature and problems. The Bible presents humans as created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), fallen through sin (Romans 3:23), and redeemable through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). This theological anthropology shapes how counsellors perceive clients not as autonomous individuals but as moral beings accountable to God. According to Powlison (2010,42), ‘’theological counselling assumes that sin, suffering, and redemption are not merely psychological categories but spiritual realities that require divine intervention.’’ Therefore, the counsellor’s role involves helping the counselee understand sin’s impact on their relationship with God and others, and guiding them toward repentance and faith. Theology provides a framework for understanding the roots of human struggles, such as guilt, fear, anxiety, and relational conflict. Furthermore, this counselling model’s theological implication emphasises God’s sovereignty over all circumstances. As MacArthur and Mack (1994,77) point out, believers must recognise that God works through suffering and trials to sanctify His people. This divine perspective transforms the counsellee’s understanding of adversity from mere misfortune to a means of spiritual growth.
2. **Biblical Implications**: Biblical counselling rests on the conviction that Scripture is sufficient and authoritative for addressing human problems. Paul declares, “All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV). This verse establishes the foundation for counselling that depends on God’s Word rather than human wisdom. Jay Adams (1970,65), the pioneer of the modern biblical counselling movement,

argued that psychological problems are ultimately spiritual and that Scripture provides both diagnosis and cure. From this perspective, the Bible functions as both a mirror and a map: it exposes the condition of the heart and directs the path toward restoration. The counsellor, therefore, uses Scripture not merely as a moral guideline but as a living and active instrument (Hebrews 4:12) that penetrates deeply into the human conscience. The implication for practice is that the counsellor must be deeply grounded in biblical truth and capable of contextualising it to specific life situations. Kellemen (2015,33) notes that biblical counselling involves "bringing Christ's truth into life's troubles through the ministry of the Word and the power of the Spirit." This underscores that effective counselling is a spiritual act of ministry, not merely a professional technique.

3. **Ethical and Spiritual Implications**: Biblical and theological counselling carries profound ethical implications for how counsellors view their responsibilities. Counsellors are not neutral facilitators but spiritual shepherds accountable to God for the souls they guide. As Paul instructs Timothy, the counsellor must "watch your life and doctrine closely" (1 Timothy 4:16, NIV), ensuring personal integrity and doctrinal soundness. The counsellor's ethical conduct is thus derived from biblical morality rather than secular ethics. According to Collins (2007,92), biblical counselling emphasises compassion, truth-telling, confidentiality, and humility. The counsellor's spiritual maturity becomes central to their ability to provide adequate care. This contrasts with secular ethics, which often prioritise client autonomy over divine authority. Spiritually, biblical counselling requires dependence on the Holy Spirit, who convicts, comforts, and transforms hearts (John 14:26). The implication is that human wisdom alone cannot achieve true transformation. The Holy Spirit acts as the ultimate counsellor, working through Scripture to renew minds and restore broken relationships. As Johnson (2010,108) explains, biblical counselling acknowledges that healing occurs through sanctification and growth in holiness rather than mere symptom relief.
4. **Practical Implications in Ministry:** Biblical and theological counselling has significant implications for the Church and pastoral ministry. It calls for the Church to reclaim its role as a place of soul care. According to Crabb (1977,143), the local Church must function as a "healing community" where members bear one another's

burdens (Galatians 6:2) through mutual encouragement and spiritual guidance. Therefore, pastors and Christian counsellors are urged to integrate counselling into discipleship and pastoral care. The implication is that counselling is not a specialised or optional ministry but a core expression of Christian love. Churches must train leaders in the application of biblical principles to issues such as marriage, addiction, depression, and anxiety. Additionally, biblical counselling challenges the Church to engage cultural and psychological issues from a theological standpoint. As Lambert (2016,59) notes, ‘’the modern church often struggles between integrating secular psychology and maintaining biblical fidelity.’’ The implication is that theological counselling must hold fast to the authority of Scripture while showing empathy and understanding toward human suffering.

5. **Human and Relational Implications:** Another important implication is the restoration of divine and human relationships. Biblical counselling focuses on reconciling individuals to God first, then to others. Sin often disrupts relational harmony, but forgiveness and grace restore it. According to Wright (2004,87), “biblical counselling aims to bring people into right relationship with God, which then extends to right relationships with others.” This relational implication highlights the holistic nature of biblical counselling, which addresses the heart, mind, and behaviour. Counsellors encourage counselees to grow in Christlike character, naturally producing emotional and relational healing. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) becomes the measure of maturity and wellness.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Christian counsellors, theological educators, and church leaders intentionally integrate biblical and theological principles into counselling practice. Training programmes should emphasise Scripture, doctrine, and pastoral care to ensure that counsellors are spiritually equipped to address human problems from a Christ-centred perspective. The Apostles’ Creed and the doctrine of imago Dei should serve as guiding frameworks, reminding practitioners that every person bears God’s image and that true healing flows from divine grace rather than human effort. Churches should also foster environments that promote spiritual formation, prayer, and community support as part of the healing process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the theology of counselling affirms that counselling is not merely a psychological exercise but a sacred ministry rooted in God's redemptive work. Grounded in Scripture and informed by sound theology, counsellors must reflect God's compassion, truth, and wisdom in their care for others. Ultimately, theological counselling leads individuals beyond self-understanding to spiritual renewal and reconciliation with God, achieving the wholeness that only Christ can provide.

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